

Approved For Release 2003/03/25 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300070026-1

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17 July 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

SUBJECT : American Friends Service Committee
Allegations re the Quang Ngai PIC

1. A somewhat oddball item came up at the 17 July Sullivan Committee meeting, one with which we could possibly get involved. The story briefly seems to be this:

a. The Con Son "Tiger Cage" publicity apparently induced a Mr. Louis W. Schneider of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to write a letter to President Nixon with various attachments. Copies of the package were sent to various people including the "Special House Committee to Investigate War in Indochina." It was in the capacity of members of this special committee that Congressmen Anderson and Hawkins, who saw the Con Son cages, went to Vietnam.

b. A copy of the package is appended hereto. You will note that its last enclosure is a letter (or portions of a letter) to Congressmen Anderson and Hawkins from a Dr. Marjorie Nelson, who apparently was working in Quang Ngai Province as a physician on an AFSC project from October 1967 until October 1969. This letter from Dr. Nelson and her allegations are also referred to in Mr. Schneider's 10 July letter to Ambassador Bui Diem, which is also part of the package.

c. Dr. Nelson alleges that she treated patients, including women (one seven months pregnant), who had been systematically and deliberately tortured in the Quang Ngai Provincial Interrogation Center.

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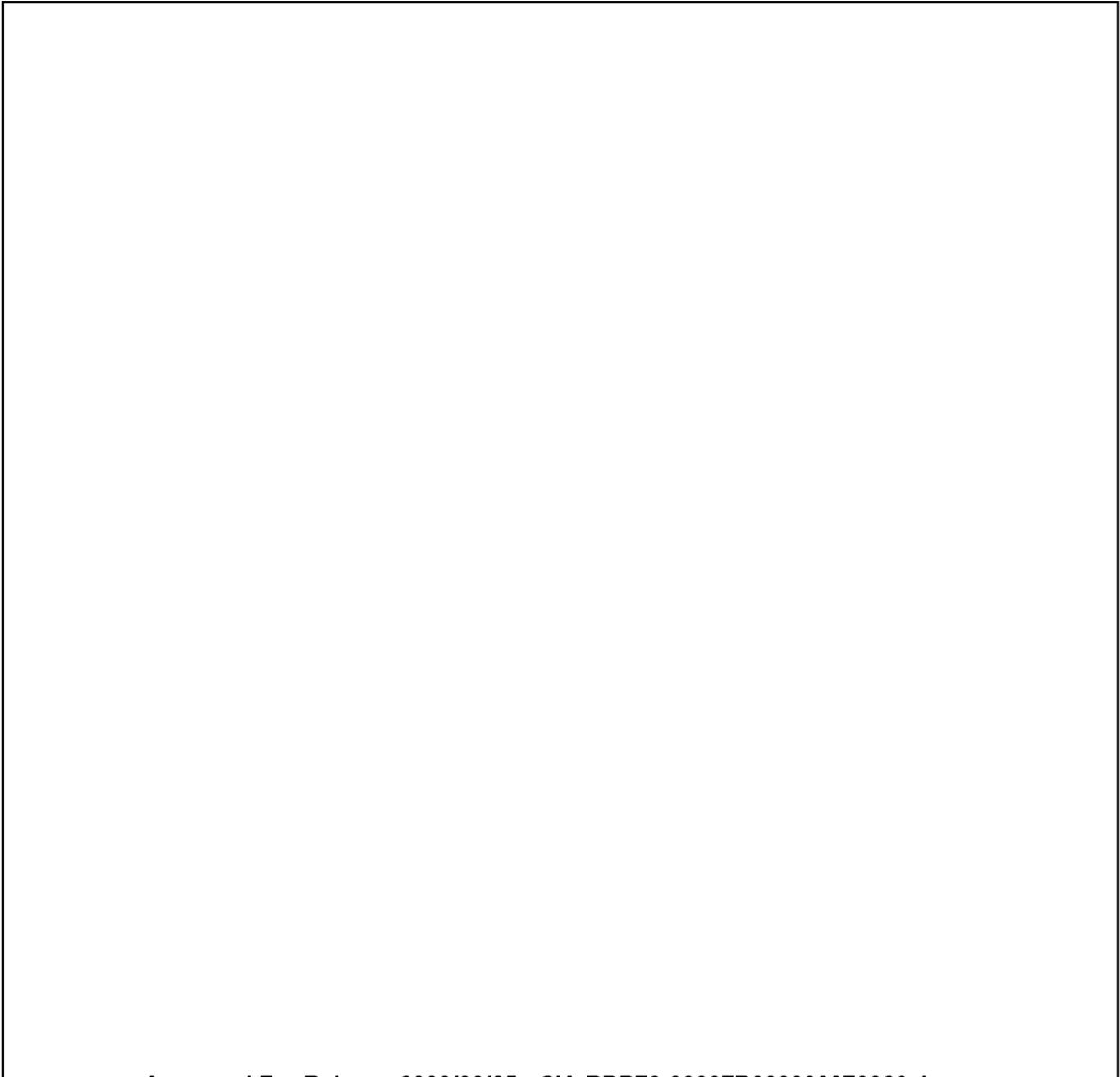
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d. Mr. Engel (Director, Vietnam Working Group -- Free Matthews' replacement) said Dr. Nelson was testifying before a congressional committee on the morning of 17 July. When pressed, Mr. Engel said he thought it was the "Moss Committee" (a subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations), but he was not sure.

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5. Some of the above data will probably have to be obtained from [] some may be unattainable. I will keep Sullivan & Co. at bay until we can collect enough facts to caucus and determine how best to proceed. I am sending copies of this note and its attachments to Messrs. Meyer and Maury who should be kept apprised of developments as they occur.

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Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

cc: Mr. Cord Meyer
Mr. John Maury ✓

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Second Viet Prison Is Called Inhuman

United Press International

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A report of a second South Vietnamese prison where inmates were tortured and subjected to "inhuman practices" was disclosed yesterday by one of the congressmen who drew attention to "tiger cage" cells on Conson Island.

The report, a letter to the congressmen from an American woman doctor who served 13 months in Vietnam with the American Friends Service Committee, alleged dozens of political prisoners were tortured at Quang Ngai prison with electrical shocks, beatings and other abuses.

Rep. William A. Anderson (D-Tenn.) who placed the letter in the Congressional Record for publication today, said it validated his conviction since visiting Conson that abuse of prisoners was widespread in South Vietnam.

Late yesterday Anderson reported he had arranged for the letter's author, Dr. Marjorie Nelson of New Haven, Conn., to testify today before a House Foreign Operations subcommittee looking into South Vietnamese prison conditions.

Dr. Nelson served 13 months at the Quang Ngai province civilian hospital. Beginning in September, 1968, not long after spending 59 days as a captive of the Vietcong.

She emphasized in her letter that overcrowded prison conditions and a nearby province interrogation center were to blame, not prison administrators.

Here are excerpts of her account:

Torture—"I saw dozens of patients with bruises of varying severity. I also examined patients who had coughed up, vomited or urinated blood after being beaten about the chest, back and stomach. On at least two occasions I was able to document by x-rays,

fractures of the bones following beatings. Prisoners also told me of being tortured by electricity, with wires attached to ears, nipples, and genitalia, by being forced to drink concoctions containing powdered lime and other noxious substances, by being tied up and suspended by ropes, often upside down, from the rafters for hours . . . I examined a woman seven months pregnant who had been badly beaten the previous week. This was the worst example . . .

Conditions—"The nurse assigned to Quang Ngai prison was an opium addict, and I only met him in the dispensary once in my 13 months there. Prisoners themselves manned the dispensary . . . In addition to the crowding there was neither running water nor latrines in any of the rooms where prisoners were confined from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. and food and water were both provided in unsanitary if not contaminated condition."

Sentences—Officials said 80 per cent of the inmates were "political prisoners," but conversations with many of them indicated their political crime was improper or incomplete papers, presence in an unauthorized place "or in the case of the women, inability to account for the whereabouts of their husbands who were therefore assumed to be NLF (Vietcong) guerrillas." Officials said no one was supposed to stay in the prison for more than six months but the prisoners "never had a trial, and never knew the length of their sentence. I talked with several who were in for as long as a year."

Dr. Nelson said she and a fellow worker unsuccessfully appealed for help to the American province senior adviser and the Vietnamese province chief.

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE INC.



160 North Fifteenth Street,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102
Phone 215-563-9372

HENRY DEENIS
Chairman
HENRY J. CADDURY
Executive Chairman
BRONSON P. CLARK
Executive Secretary

JSE
[Signature]

July 10, 1970

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C. 20500

Φ *Con Son*

Dear Mr. President:

We enclose a letter we have received from Ambassador Bui Diem of the Republic of Vietnam together with a copy of our reply with an attachment. *Letter to Congressmen Anderson & Newton July 10*

The treatment of political prisoners in South Vietnam is a long-standing disgrace not only to the Thieu-Ky regime but also to the government of the United States which supplies the money, the manpower and the advisers which keep this regime and its methods in operation.

Is it not time, Mr. President, that the United States withdrew its military forces from South Vietnam? Talk of reform within the context of U.S. military intervention simply is not convincing. The inhumane practices are too well entrenched and the resistance of the Vietnamese people to the Saigon government runs too deep to leave room for the hope that this alliance of repression and violence will reform itself.

Sincerely yours,

Louis W. Schneider

Louis W. Schneider
Associate Executive Secretary

LWS:vh

cc: Special House Committee to
Investigate War in Indochina
Ambassador David Bruce
Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker
Secretary of State Rogers
Mr. Henry Kissinger
Province Senior Adviser Cushing, CORDS

*Embassy of Viet Nam,
Washington, D. C.*

June 29, 1970

M. G. D.

Sir,

In view of your deep concern and dedication in helping alleviate the horrors of war, and most particularly, your efforts in demanding humane treatment for war prisoners, for which we remain highly appreciative, I take the liberty to present to you, for your kind attention, the following:

Out of humanitarian consideration and in compliance with the Geneva Convention on the treatment of the prisoners of war, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, late last year, instructed its delegation to the Paris Peace Talks to advise the Communist side, at the 42nd plenary session of the meetings on November 13, 1969, of our decision to hand over to the Hanoi administration 62 prisoners of war among the elements of the North Vietnamese regular army captured on the battlefields in South Vietnam.

At the time of capture these POWs were suffering from the effects of battlewounds. But, thanks to the most appropriate medical care and humane treatment given by our responsible officials their condition has much improved and they have been found fit for repatriation. In fact, they all have expressed the wish of being sent back to their families located in North Vietnam, and my government has decided to accede to their request.

However, the offer, which was repeatedly extended by our delegation in Paris, to return them to the Hanoi administration, has been consistently refused by the Communists. This negative attitude, inhuman and cruel to the extreme, has been interpreted at best as an expression of fear on the part of Hanoi, the fear of the repercussion of their soldiers' disillusionment on the population of the North, because Hanoi has lied about the true situation in the South. At the same time, it could be seen as an effort, to prevent the exposure of a sad truth, the truth of the Ho Chi Minh Trail being only a one way penetration road. But above all, and it might very well be the true reason, it could

be their fear of being accused of having soldiers in South Vietnam, a fact which they have always systematically denied, although it is already well known to the whole world.

Nevertheless, motivated solely by the desire to help them to recover their physical and mental health and upon their earnest request, my government has decided to go ahead with their repatriation.

To that effect, their release will take place on July 11, 1970 at a selected location on the coast of North Vietnam in the Demilitarized zone.

They will be transported by the Vietnamese Navy to a point near the above mentioned location, then sent ashore in small boats to be returned to the North Vietnamese authorities.

Our delegation to the Paris Peace Talks has been instructed to inform the Communist side of the details of this operation and to demand that North Vietnam refrain from all hostile action on the land, on the sea, and in the air in the area of release on that particular date.

Our delegation has also been told to make clear to the Communist side that the prisoners to be freed this time constitute only a first group and that more POWs will be released in the future.

At the same time, our delegation is to inform them of our government's decision to return to North Vietnam, 24 North Vietnamese fishermen whose boats illegally entered the territorial waters of the Republic of Vietnam in 1965.

In bringing the above to your attention, I should like to add only a short comment: the repatriation of the North Vietnamese POWs is entirely unconditional. We ask nothing in return from the Communists, as we consider it a routine humanitarian act, common to any civilized nation of the world. We sincerely hope that it will meet with your kind approval.

Please accept, Sir, the assurance of my highest consideration,

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, INC.



100 North Fifteenth Street,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102
Phone 215-563-9372

HENRY DEERITS
Chairman
HENRY J. CADBURY
Honorary Chairman
BRONSON P. CLARK
Executive Secretary

July 10, 1970

Ambassador Bui Diem
Embassy of Vietnam
2251 R Street N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20008

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

We have received your letter of June 29, 1970 regarding the announced July 11, 1970 release of 62 North Vietnamese prisoners who have been held by your government, and also the decision to return to North Vietnam 24 North Vietnamese fishermen who were seized in 1965 and have been held prisoner ever since. We also have read accounts in the New York Times of the cruel treatment of prisoners on Con Son Island.

The New York Times reports that two U.S. Congressmen who were engaged in a fact-finding tour managed to gain entry to the notorious "tiger cages" area of Con Son where they found some 500 prisoners (both men and women) confined in 86 filthy concrete pits. The persons held in these claimed they were beaten, hungry, sick, without medicine and without sufficient water. The congressional fact-finders reported that while "it was high enough for the prisoners to stand up--none of the men did. They dragged themselves to the spot where they could look up and speak to us."

We have in mind the fact that possibly it may be claimed that some distinction must be made between "prisoners of war" and persons held on civil charges. We also have in mind that the line that separates "civil offenses" from participation in the armed struggle against your government and against the armed forces of the United States by Vietnamese is a very blurred line in South Vietnam today; this seems especially the case when one ponders the fact that the Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war provides among other things that:

1. An individual protected person detained as a spy or saboteur or under suspicion of activity hostile to the security of the occupying power shall be treated with humanity;
2. Protected persons shall at all times be humanely treated and no physical or moral coercion shall be used to obtain information from them.

However one may sort these matters out we are struck by your statement regarding the release of the 62 prisoners and the 24 fishermen in your June 29 letter that "we ask nothing in return from the Communists as we consider it a routine humanitarian act, common to any civilized nation of the world."

Ambassador Bui Diem - 7/10/70 - page 2

It has been our experience gained during our own efforts to engage in therapeutic and social service in Quang Ngai over a period of years that humanitarian standards are not observed as a matter of routine in South Vietnam when it comes to political prisoners, persons held in prison on suspicion of lending support or sympathy to the NLF forces, or persons accused of actively opposing the Thieu-Ky regime.

Medical staff connected with our Quang Ngai team have had direct, personal contact with civilian prisoners in the Quang Ngai jail who were routinely subjected to interrogation under torture at the Interrogation Center in Quang Ngai. Prisoners have told our medical staff members of having been taken from the jail to the Interrogation Center and there being beaten, tortured with electrodes, and otherwise subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment. Our medical and nursing staff have observed physical marks on the bodies of such prisoners (both men and women), and also psychological symptoms, which were corroborative of these reports of explicit and deliberate torture.

Our people have made complaints both to the local Vietnamese authorities and to the American authorities in Quang Ngai without any discernible effect.

So long as such conditions exist (and persistent rumors of similar conditions come from many parts of South Vietnam) it is idle for one to claim that treatment of prisoners in South Vietnam is humanitarian or civilized.

The American Friends Service Committee long has concerned itself with the plight of prisoners in Vietnam, both in South Vietnam and in the North, both American and Vietnamese. Over a period of months our representatives made a number of visits to North Vietnamese who were being held by the American authorities near Danang, inquiring about their needs and taking certain supplies to them. These visits continued until the release and repatriation of these prisoners about two years ago. Later one of our representatives while visiting in Phnom Penh made inquiries of representatives of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and of the Provisional Revolutionary Government regarding possible services to others held in South Vietnam. In 1968 an AFSC staff member went to Hanoi and facilitated the repatriation of three American pilots released by the North Vietnamese authorities. At that time and subsequently AFSC representatives have carried packets of letters from relatives of Americans held in detention camps in North Vietnam and have returned with letters from the captured pilots to their relatives. One of our staff members in Quang Ngai, Dr. Majorie Nelson, was captured by Liberation Army forces in Hue during the 1968 Tet offensive and later, after 59 days was released unharmed. More recently two of our staff sent messages to North Vietnam officials expressing concern and hope for the early release of U.S. press correspondent Richard Dudman and his two colleagues who were captured in Cambodia and released unharmed after 41 days.

We mention these instances to indicate the intimacy and scope of our experience and concern as a service body for those held captive in this war. We would like to see the early release of all political prisoners and prisoners of war whether they be held in the North or in the South in Vietnam. The release of even a small number is a step in the right direction.

Ambassador Bui Diem - 7/10/70 - page 3

But we are concerned also that such a step not be used, even inadvertently, as an occasion to hide a wider and a more appalling condition of human cruelty and human suffering. While thousands are held under conditions of extreme harshness, as is now the case in South Vietnam, it is no time to congratulate either the government of the United States nor any of its allied government in South Vietnam. Much more must be done.

We enclose a letter written by our former staff colleague at Quang Ngai, Dr. Marjorie Nelson, who we mention above. Her letter is self-explanatory. If you would like to meet with Dr. Nelson and discuss her firsthand observations with respect to these matters, she has informed us that she would welcome the opportunity to meet with you.

Sincerely yours,



Louis W. Schneider
Associate Executive Secretary

LWS:vh

Copy of a letter sent by Dr. Marjorie Nelson to Congressman Augustus F. Hawkins and Congressman William R. Anderson.

- July 10, 1970
- 47 Bishop
New Haven, Conn. 06511

Dear Mr. Congressman,

I have read with more than casual interest the accounts in the New York Times July 7 and July 8 of your visit to Con Son Island prison in the first week of July. I worked as a doctor with the American Friends Service Committee project in Quang Ngai from October 1967 to October 1969. From September 1968 to October 1969 as part of my work there I made regular visits once or twice a week to the Quang Ngai civilian prison where I examined and treated prisoners. I would like to share my experiences with you as I feel it is directly related to your own brief visit.

The prison in Quang Ngai was built by the French to house approximately 500 prisoners. During the time I worked there the prison population ranged from 800 to 1300, usually between 150 to 300 of them women. Many of these women had their children with them -- 40 to 120 children. Crowding was compounded by the fact that in August 1967 the NLF troops attacked and overran the prison (releasing some 1000 prisoners) and damaged several buildings. At least two of these large buildings were still partially or completely roofless in the fall of 1969. I quote from a letter I sent to the AFSC office in Philadelphia in February 1969, shortly after I had returned from a furlough to my work in Quang Ngai.

"In addition to the room I described to you in (a previous letter) two small square rooms approximately 15x15 at most with only small slit windows at the top of three walls held respectively fifty and forty women and children. No beds provided in either one. A large room approximately 45x15 with two tiered wooden bunks filling the room leaving an aisle between housing 200 women. They slept on the floor under the bunks as well as on both tiers. Another room slightly smaller houses 75 women and three small children but contains only a couple of tables and no bed. Two other small rooms perhaps 12x30 housed a total of 74 women also with no beds. These latter two rooms have now been emptied and another large building without a roof is now being occupied by an undetermined number of women. Large tarpaulin tents have been spread over the rafters to provide a roof of sorts.

"My first visit after I returned I found widespread colds and diarrhea among the patients especially the children which is to be expected when a lot of people get thrown together like this. The dispensary was completely out of cough medicine and diarrhea preparations and had been for several days."

We were invited by the Prison Chief in the summer of 1968 to make regular medical visits to the prison because he had many sick prisoners. Successive Prison Chiefs were very helpful to us and eager for us to continue our work. We were given free access to the prison by day and cooperation from the Prison Chief on several occasions when our work required it. We were informed both by prison officials and by prisoners that 80% or more of the inmates were "political prisoners." Personal conversations

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with prisoners seemed to indicate that in many cases their "political crime" was improper or incomplete papers, presence in an "unauthorized place" or in the case of the women inability to account for the whereabouts of their husbands who were therefore assumed to be NLF guerillas. In addition many prisoners paid bribes to gain their release and on several occasions the assertion was made to me that they had been arrested for the sole purpose of extorting money from them.

We were told by officials that this was a minimum security prison and no one was supposed to stay who had a sentence of more than four to six months. However, prisoners never met their accusers (except in the Province Interrogation Center), never had a trial, and never knew the length of their sentence. I talked with several who were in for as long as a year.

It is my understanding that regulations provide for a nurse to be assigned to the province prison. However the nurse assigned to Quang Ngai Prison was an opium addict and I only met him in the dispensary once in my thirteen months there. Prisoners themselves manned the dispensary out of whatever knowledge had been passed on to them about administration of drugs and treatment of diseases. In addition to the crowding there was neither running water nor latrines in any of the rooms where prisoners were confined from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. and food and water were both provided in unsanitary if not contaminated condition.

In addition to treating the common ailments and the infectious diseases and malnutrition occasioned by these conditions, I also regularly examined and treated prisoners who had been tortured. This seems not to have occurred in the prison itself but in the Province Interrogation Center. I saw dozens of patients with bruises of varying severity. I also examined patients who had coughed up, vomited, or urinated blood after being beaten about the chest, back and stomach. On at least two occasions I was able to document by x-rays fractures of the bones following beatings. Prisoners also told me of being tortured by electricity, with wires attached to ears, nipples and genitalia, by being forced to drink concoctions containing powdered lime and other noxious substances, by being tied up and suspended by ropes, often upside down, from the rafters for hours. On at least three occasions patients seriously ill or injured and under my care were removed to the Province Interrogation Center without my knowledge for further interrogation.

In April 1969 another team member and I presented this situation to the American Province Senior Adviser asking his advice as to how to seek to stop these practices. He shared our distress at this and promised to speak to the man in charge of the Province Interrogation Center -- a project started by the U.S. to teach "enlightened intelligence and interrogation procedures." In a subsequent visit he informed us that the Province Interrogation Center was no longer under U.S. control but had been turned over to the Vietnamese and therefore he would encourage us to go directly to Col. Khien, the Province Chief. On April 20, 1969 we spent approximately thirty-five minutes with Col. Khien and I presented my experience and we expressed our conviction that this was self-defeating on political grounds as well as unacceptable on humanitarian grounds. He essentially acknowledged that some beatings did take place and that he was aware of it; that some prisoners were "very hard" and refused to talk and in such situations physical force was necessary and was employed to get information. However he said "there are limits." We suggested that he might need to intervene with the Province Interrogation Center authorities to see that this was adhered to but my

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impression was that he was not willing or not able to substantially alter the practices.

In August 1969 in my pre-natal clinic in the prison I examined a woman seven months pregnant who had been badly beaten the previous week. This was the worst example of the beatings which I continued to see so I again called on the American Province Senior Adviser and brought this latest case to his attention. He promised to raise it with the Province Chief again. He went on to say, due to a recent directive from Saigon to free prisoners whose guilt was only suspected, and the general pressure about the treatment of prisoners, that quite a few prisoners had been released (the census at that time was down slightly - about 100). He also said that the Americans had been sending fewer people into the Interrogation Center. He seemed to imply that the Americans were largely responsible for sending detainees into the Province Interrogation Center although they did not control the center itself. There were very few going through it then compared to the 100 per month previously, he stated. He said "that means at least fewer people will be getting the treatment and supposedly only those people most likely to be productive." I replied that in my opinion even if that woman for example was an NLF cadre I did not consider it acceptable to beat a pregnant woman.

Since returning to the U.S. I have shared my experience with a few Senators and Congressmen or their aides. My concern and that of the American Friends Service Committee has always been to alleviate the suffering of these prisoners. I urge you to do whatever you can to end these inhuman practices and I am ready to offer you any further help that I can.

Sincerely,

Marjorie Nelson, M.D.